



Harrow, S. R. (2016). 'Je suis de race inférieure de toute éternité': Towards a Postcolonial Reading of Rimbaud. *Modern Language Review*, 111(4), 956-974.
<https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.111.4.0956>

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to published version (if available):
[10.5699/modelangrevi.111.4.0956](https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.111.4.0956)

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Offprinted from

MODERN LANGUAGE REVIEW

VOLUME 111, PART 4

OCTOBER 2016

‘JE SUIS DE RACE INFÉRIEURE DE TOUTE ÉTERNITÉ’: TOWARDS A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF RIMBAUD

From the Red Sea port of Aden where he landed in August 1880, Rimbaud wrote home: ‘Aden est un roc affreux, sans un seul brin d’herbe ni une goutte d’eau bonne’ (letter of 25 August).¹ The physical and existential wilderness of Aden, made a British protectorate under the Raj, was the launch pad for Rimbaud’s exploits across the Bab el-Mandeb Strait in Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Several weeks later, he continued: ‘Aden [. . .] est le lieu le plus ennuyeux du monde après toutefois celui que vous habitez’ (letter of 22 September, OC, p. 315). In these acid terms Rimbaud wrote to his mother and his sister in Northern France, complaining of the physical harshness and the arid reality of his geographical and colonial situation. Aden and the French Ardennes are places separated by almost 4000 miles, but for the poet both were synonymous with stultifying vacancy, asinine authority, and corrosive *ennui*. More than aversive physical places, Aden and the Ardennes were, for Rimbaud, sites of constrained consciousness.² Rimbaud’s collapsing together of colonial Aden and the bourgeois Ardennes—this conflation in aversiveness that informs his correspondence—provides the starting point and the direction for my reading of a ‘postcolonial’ Rimbaud.

A ‘postcolonial’ Rimbaud may, on the face of it, seem an unlikely proposition. Rimbaud’s overseas exploits had begun with his brief enlistment, in 1876, in the Dutch colonial army (he was packed off to Sumatra and Java, from where he deserted ten days later); he made enterprising attempts to find work ‘dans tous les ports de la mer Rouge’, which led to his recruitment by the coffee traders Viannay–Bardey in Aden.³ Rimbaud’s exploits culminated in his commercial ventures and political adventuring in Abyssinia, where he was dependent on slave traders for his working of the route between Obock and Harrar. His entrepreneurial activities in continental Africa unfolded against the backdrop of the European colonizing drive of the 1880s and 1890s, the notorious ‘scramble for Africa’.⁴ From his base at Harrar,

¹ Arthur Rimbaud, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Antoine Adam (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 314. References to this edition are hereafter abbreviated as OC followed by page number, and are given in the text.

² Graham Robb, *Rimbaud* (London: Norton, 2000), pp. 311–12, describes Aden’s Hôtel de l’Univers as a hub of colonial activity and a centre for the funding of mercantile ventures. A photograph of Rimbaud and his associates at the Hôtel de l’Univers conveys an atmosphere of sullen tedium. (Booksellers Jacques Desse and Alban Causse found the photograph in a French bric-a-brac market in 2010, and the image was authenticated by the literary biographer and Rimbaud historian Jean-Jacques Lefrère.)

³ OC, p. 313 (letter of 17 August 1880) and p. 314 (letter of 25 August).

⁴ Robb explains Rimbaud’s reliance on slave traders to ensure his safe passage from Obock (under French control) and his avoidance of British territory (Britain being at work on the abolition of slavery) (*Rimbaud*, pp. 390–91). Enid Starkie’s assertion, in her monograph *Arthur*

Rimbaud engaged in trading, hunting, ivory-trafficking, and gun-running, exploits on which the myth of Rimbaud's later days—the last decade of his life—is built.⁵ An avant-garde poet-turned-merchant venturer, Rimbaud might, arguably, be seen to solicit the label 'colonial' (rather than 'postcolonial'): he pursued an existential dream that had initially foundered on the stony ground 'back home', that had shrivelled on the territory of metropolitan modernity, and that was subsequently transformed into an exoticist quest for fulfilment *ailleurs*, a quest made possible by the colonialist ambitions of the Western European powers in Africa. Notwithstanding the historical context and the commercial motivation, I stress 'arguably [. . .] "colonial"' because Rimbaud's intellectual independence and his creative agency make for a capacious, more complex reality. His critique of Western colonialist attitudes towards Africa, his energetic commitment to learning indigenous languages (including Arabic), his investment in new skills, his documenting of ornithology and ethnography, and his submissions (essays, descriptions of the region) to the Société de Géographie de Paris, for which they represented unique research findings—all indicate a receptive and responsive approach to his new location (which is not to suggest, either, that his position or practices necessarily *exclude* colonialist attitudes and exploitative practices).⁶ Graham Robb's biography offers an illuminating, nuanced reading of Rimbaud's East African situation, and indicates the scope for a postcolonial approach to Rimbaud's *life* story. A postcolonial approach informs Rosemary Peters's recent reading of Rimbaud's enlightened engagement with context and culture in his report writing on Abyssinia.⁷ For Peters, Rimbaud's reports are a work of 'life writing' by an author who participates in the colonial project while disengaging from it critically. Peters tackles the complexities of textual genre and ethical values, and it is precisely the imbrication of modernist writing

Rimbaud in Abyssinia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), that Rimbaud was engaged in—and enthused by—slave trading has thus been dismantled by Robb and others. J. A. Ferguson's article, 'The Identity and Function of the Negro in Rimbaud's Poetry and Correspondence', *French Studies*, 39 (1985) 43–58, acknowledges Rimbaud's enlightened view of the Ethiopian people in his reports and correspondence, but seeks monological meaning in Rimbaud's poetry and, in particular, in *Une saison en enfer*, an approach at odds with the modernist equivocation and, as I argue here, the postcolonial porosity of Rimbaud's writing.

⁵ Robb, *Rimbaud*, pp. 360–61.

⁶ Robb details Rimbaud's wish list of books and materials, including photographic equipment, to be prepared and despatched ahead of his move to Abyssinia (*Rimbaud*, pp. 316 ff.). Robb goes on to critique Starkie's patrician view of Rimbaud's attempts to acquire skills and knowledge, identifying his very real concern to equip himself for his journeys into territory unexplored by Europeans, namely the vast space of the Ogaden (*ibid.*, pp. 323–29).

⁷ Rosemary Peters, 'Mapping the Desert: Arthur Rimbaud, Charles de Foucauld, and the Société de Géographie, 1884–1885', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 35 (2009), 104–27, focuses on Rimbaud's report on the Ogaden ('Rapport sur l'Ogadine', published in 1884). Peters's close reading of Rimbaud's photographic self-portraits is illuminating in its exposure of the ambivalence of his apparent colonial identity and assumptions.

and postcolonial thought that interests me here, albeit on quite different terrain.

My aim is to read for a postcolonial consciousness, not in the conjectures and assumptions that filter the biographical 'life', as Robb and Peters have done, but in poetry itself: in its structures and rhetoric, and in its framing of constrained and constraining attitudes.⁸ My textual ground for this reading is Rimbaud's *Poésies* (1870–71) and *Une saison en enfer* (1873). To read for a postcolonial consciousness in the poetry is to follow Rimbaud's own early lead and his literary engagement with postcolonial resistance in North Africa. In the Latin verse poem 'Jugurtha', composed in 1869 by the fourteen-year-old Rimbaud, the ghost of Jugurtha, the Numidian king who resisted Roman colonization in the second century BCE, urges the Algerian Abdelkader to oppose European invasion and appropriation. Here, the schoolboy poet exposes and ironizes colonialist desire and ideology, anticipating the transhistorical, transcultural, and transnational perspectives of his later work.⁹ To read for a postcolonial consciousness in Rimbaud's poetry is also to follow the lead of Aimé Césaire, as a modernist poet and the founder of the Négritude generation. At roughly mid-point between Rimbaud's age and the apogee of postcolonial thought at the turn of the twenty-first century, Césaire writes his coruscating poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939), its disrupted syntax and oneiric visions of resistance revealing a deep affinity with Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer*:

Mais qui tourne ma voix? Qui écorche ma voix? Me fourrant dans la gorge mille crocs de bambou. Mille pieux d'oursin. C'est toi sale bout de monde. C'est toi sale haine. C'est toi poids de l'insulte et cent ans de coups de fouet. C'est toi cent ans de ma patience, cent ans de mes soins juste à ne pas mourir.
rooh oh¹⁰

In focusing on Rimbaud's early verse poems and his auto-fictional prose poem I am alert to the double risk of eliding the formal distinctiveness of the *Poésies* and of *Une saison en enfer*, and of downplaying their formal relationality. If verse poetry and prose poetry relate differently to questions of constraint and liberation through their contrastive (inflexible/flexible) engagement with spatiality, it would seem to follow analogically that they relate differently to questions of colonial authority and resistance. Yet, Rimbaud's poetry offers a

⁸ In setting out to explore a postcolonial consciousness, I am not, however, claiming that Rimbaud writes 'postcolonial poetry'. That blanket concept term is at once too generalizing and too reductive to capture the fluctuations of Rimbaud's modernist writing.

⁹ Hédi Abdel-Jaouad's *Rimbaud et l'Algérie* (Algiers: EDIF, 2000) is an important work in beginning the process of exploring a postcolonial Rimbaud in the discourse of poetry itself. Abdel-Jaouad focuses both on the political dimension and on the proleptic poetic value of Rimbaud's 'Jugurtha' in anticipating the 'dérèglement de tous les sens' (p. 83) and metempsychosis (p. 84) through the trope of the poet—who becomes Jugurtha—who becomes Abdelkader.

¹⁰ Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1983), p. 31.

more complex, equivocal vision. Verse poetry resurrects familiar constraining frameworks, but the socio-cultural critique of his *Poésies* and the visionary audacity of 'Le Bateau ivre' and 'Voyelles' place constraints of taste, voice, vision, and prosody constantly under pressure, cracking the old forms from within. Prose poetry may 'interrogate the established orders of poetry and prose' through its pliant relationship to spatiality, but as Clive Scott, reading 'Royaute' (*Illuminations*), has argued, 'the prose poem is the site of the freeing of poetry from the colonial *and* the leading of prose towards it' (my emphasis).¹¹ Prose poetry that veers from its political project and turns inwards in its self-aestheticization may indeed reaffirm the colonial, as Scott acknowledges, but Rimbaud's prose poetry in its modernist staging of competing voices and its resolute lack of resolution constantly problematizes and provisionally undoes binaries. So, there is much (beyond the interpolation of verse poems in *Une saison*) that links verse and prose poetry in Rimbaud: centrally, it is the tilt towards the freedom of experimental (prose) writing in *Poésies* and the liberation of poetic vision in the prose of *Une saison* that unites more audaciously than it separates.

Method

My approach is dual: to consider how key values in contemporary postcolonial thought may shed fuller light on the poetry which Rimbaud wrote between 1870 and 1873, and, reciprocally, to explore how Rimbaud's modernist poetic writing may focus and illuminate postcolonial concerns *avant la lettre*. I see three areas of potential benefit here. First, there is the underexplored critical scope of making a postcolonial reading in a genre area—poetry (both verse and prose)—that is often marginalized by the privileging of literary fiction in Postcolonial Studies. Second, a postcolonial approach in the subfield of Poetry Studies contributes to an expansion of the wider field of nineteenth-century 'French Studies', a period area that, to date, has been dominated by studies of narrative and of historical documents.¹² Third and more precisely, an exploratory reading that seeks to make sense of both the aesthetic turn and the ethical turn can help us test the holistic benefits of allying creative and postcolonial values in the reading of French modernist poetry. Nicholas

¹¹ Clive Scott, *Translating Rimbaud's 'Illuminations'* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), p. 196.

¹² The field of postcolonial Francophone Studies in nineteenth-century literature is synonymous with the work of Chris Bongie. The imbrication of readings in Cultural Studies and in postcolonial thought guides Bongie's *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism and the Fin de Siècle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) and *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post-Colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008). Jennifer Yee's *Exotic Subversions in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* (London: Legenda, 2008), on Chateaubriand, Hugo, Flaubert, and Segalen, is an important study of the literary resistance of metropolitan canonical writers to the imperialist project.

Harrison argued, in his reading of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, that resistance to the colonialist telos shares common ground with modernism's tenet of anti-linearity and simultaneity.¹³ My reading here seeks to ally postcolonial thought with literary modernism in the study of experimental poetry, and thus tackle a persisting genre blind spot of contemporary criticism.

While the search for methodological reciprocity between Rimbaud's poetic writing and postcolonial discourse is tempting and, I hope to demonstrate, valid, it is important to avoid the anachronistic conflation of two historically distinct periods, the one colonial (French late Second Empire/early Third Republic), the other postcolonial (the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries). As well as recognizing the historical differences between an imperialist project that was the hegemonic norm (the 'scramble for Africa' of the European nation states) and the broadly post-imperial contemporary world-view that defines Western liberal thought in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to be alert to the genre differences between modernist poetry and postcolonial thought, between poetic rhetoric and theoretical rhetoric. So my reading is necessarily a search for analogies (and can be no more than that) between the discourse of nineteenth-century alienation (that is, alienation from the dominant Western value system, with its components of 'home', 'class', 'work', 'gender', 'authority', 'state', and 'aesthetic taste') and the tenets and discourse of modern postcolonial thought.

In Rimbaud's poetry (1870–73), which precedes by some ten years his (real-life) Abyssinian escapades (1880–91), I contend that an embryonic *postcolonial* consciousness is at work in discourse which is exploratory in the political and poetic values, and the ethical and aesthetic projects, that it takes forward. Rimbaud's poetry may be seen as a counter-discourse (in the sense intended by Richard Terdiman) in which the discourse of constraining bourgeois value systems is subverted by alternative rhetorical strategies.¹⁴ Rimbaud's counter-discourse, with its modernist destructuring energy, challenges dominant European values—specifically, Enlightenment principles—of logic, clarity, and reason, as a reading of the volatility and anti-teleological resistance of the visionary verse poems ('Voyelles', 'Le Bateau ivre') and the prose works (*Une saison en enfer* and *Illuminations*) makes clear.¹⁵ For

¹³ In *Postcolonial Criticism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003) Harrison argues that Conrad's fluctuating modernist narrative is consistent with a rejection of the teleology of colonial discourse. See pp. 27–30 ff.

¹⁴ Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

¹⁵ A postcolonial reading of *Illuminations* is beyond the scope of the present article, though such a reading is urgently required given that poems such as 'Mouvement' and 'Démocratie' probe narratives of imperial expansion and capitalist 'progress' in ways that anticipate postcolonial critique. Studies of Rimbaud's prose poetry include Antoine Fongaro, *De la lettre à l'esprit: pour lire 'Illuminations'* (Paris: Champion, 2004); Susan Harrow, 'Debris, Mess, and the Modernist Self:

example, the prose poem 'Après le déluge' (*Illuminations*), in its oneiric juxtaposition and displacement of images, disrupts its own discourse of factual assertion and exposes the process of cultural appropriation and territorial imposition in an imagined geography that simultaneously connects and collapses Alpine range, desert (or steppe) environment, and polar space:

Madame *** établit un piano dans les Alpes. La messe et les premières communions se célébrèrent aux cent mille autels de la cathédrale.

Les caravanes partirent. Et le Splendide-Hôtel fut bâti dans le chaos de glaces et de nuit du pôle. (OC, p. 121)

Where poetic counter-discourse calls into question cultural, social, economic, and linguistic hegemonies, it exposes and displaces the structures and practices of authority, illuminating and complicating questions of centre and periphery.

Reading for a postcolonial consciousness has wider implications in terms of canons that are literary, historiographical, and methodological. Straightaway, we find ourselves working against the grain of Edward Said's approach in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), where Said offers a model for reading canonical literature as, primarily, a site of colonial affirmation, explicit or implied, rather than as a space of postcolonial resistance.¹⁶ Rimbaud provides an intriguing and, one might say, oxymoronic case for study in this respect. He is a writer who is, at once, anti-canonical and fully canonized. It follows that his Western avant-garde institutionalization offers promising terrain on which to test an approach that counters Said's by aligning, rather than opposing, canonicity and resistance, establishment and subversion, and by bringing these values into a tense dialogue, as Rimbaud's poetry itself constantly does. The tension in Rimbaud's poetry parallels the tension in the wider discipline between assumptions of cultural hegemony and values of aesthetic resistance and innovation. The methodological canons of postcolonial thought may be described in terms of historiography (postcolonialism continues to locate itself predominantly in the fields of twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature in the context of an assumedly postcolonial world); nationality (postcolonialism focuses, in the main, on literature produced outside metropolitan France or

Rimbaud from *Poésies* to *Illuminations*', in ead., *The Material, the Real, and the Fractured Self: Subjectivity and Representation from Rimbaud to Réda* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 11–61; Steve Murphy, *Stratégies de Rimbaud* (Paris: Champion, 2004); Aimee Israel-Pelletier, *Rimbaud's Impressionist Poetics: Vision and Visuality* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), Chapter 2, 'Consolidated Vision', explores the colonial 'structure of attitude and reference' (p. 73) in modern canonical literature of Western cultures and through examples drawn from Austen, Dickens, Verdi, Verne, and Kipling. At the same time, Said's articulation is more complex and itself hybrid, for he recognizes the power of canonical (specifically *modernist*) literature to problematize colonial positions and values through modes of irony.

produced by non-metropolitan writers based in the metropolis); and genre (postcolonialism's generic focus is, primarily, narrative).¹⁷ Rimbaud—writing in France, writing poetry, and writing around 1870–71—might at first sight appear to lie outside the familiar parameters of the postcolonial canons—in terms of geography, genre, and historiography. So, a broader, related objective of my reading is to test some of those boundaries, to place them under pressure, and to bring into dialogue assumptions both avant-garde and canonical, and values hexagonal and postcolonial. That objective is, in metaphorical terms, comparable to relating Aden and the Ardennes (as Rimbaud does when he 'writes back' to his mother and his sister) in the confrontation with European—and Western—values.¹⁸

The Wilderness of Civilization

Postcolonialism exposes and deconstructs colonialism's 'civilizing mission' abroad and on 'home' territory: Rimbaud's poetry reveals a strikingly parallel deconstructive process at work on a project that is European and imperial. This is insistently marked in *Une saison en enfer*, where the rejection of the structures and practices of authority begins, as it must, with the lucid recognition of hegemonic constructions and colonial ascriptions: 'Il m'est bien évident que j'ai toujours été race inférieure' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 94). The lure of assimilation stirs defiant negation and provokes an affirmation of alterity: 'Je n'ai jamais été de ce peuple-ci; je n'ai jamais été chrétien; je suis de la race qui chantait dans le supplice' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 97). The early prospect of benevolent white conquerors 'saving' the narrator-turned-indigenous

¹⁷ The primary valorization of late modern and contemporary literature as a site of postcolonial enquiry is increasingly relativized as researchers in earlier periods identify opportunities for fresh readings of the relations between centre and periphery, and between dominant and subaltern. Two such growth areas are the medieval period and the nineteenth century. A major work, responding to the call made by Bruce Holsinger in 2002 for medievalists to assess and apply the resources of postcolonial thought, is *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, ed. by Ananya Jaharana Kabira and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Simon Gaunt's review article 'Can the Middle Ages be Postcolonial?', *Comparative Literature*, 61 (2009), 160–76, surveys a decade of monograph studies in postcolonial Medieval Studies and argues for the broader application of concepts in postcolonialism to the deeper understanding of hybridity, migration, and transmission in the construction of medieval 'Europe'. In postcolonial Francophone Studies, Chris Bongie's work on Hugo in *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/colonial Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) exposes the implicit postcolonial consciousness informing literature of the colonial era.

¹⁸ This Aden–Ardennes axis helps focus the wider question of how 'French Studies' as a discipline constitutes itself in an era of global cultural consciousness. A paradigm shift in our conception of French Studies and Francophone Studies (and other 'centre-led' disciplines of single-nation focus, e.g. 'Italian Studies', 'German Studies') is outlined by the 'Transnational Modern Languages' project developed by Charles Burdett, Jenny Burns, Derek Duncan, and Loredana Polezzi with University of Liverpool Press. See their position statement at <<http://liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/collections/series-transnational-modern-languages>> [accessed 8 February 2016].

cannibal and bringing him to 'reason' is derided in the discourse of *Une saison*, where it is mimicked in the rhetoric of naive certainties ('La raison est née. Le monde est bon. Je bénirai la vie. J'aimerai mes frères. [. . .] Dieu fait ma force, et je loue Dieu' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 98)). Modernist oscillations of pagan and Christian identities thus deliver a challenge to identarian positions and binary values.

In *Une saison en enfer* (whose original project had the titles 'Livre païen' and 'Livre nègre'), Gaullish antecedents and pagan ascendancy exclude the narrator from European Christian institutions, and situate him in the culture of the outsider. His identity is multiple and fractured: he is a colonial subaltern ('le nègre'), a Western subaltern (distinguished by his 'œil bleu blanc, [. . .] cervelle étroite, [. . .] maladresse dans la lutte' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 94)), and a pariah figure subject to interspecies morphing (he is now the leper languishing amid potsherds and nettles, now the hyena). He inhabits a space marked by values of ineptitude, savagery, inaction, and outsidership. The coincidence of Western and colonial subaltern subjectivities anticipates certain late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century propositions. For example, the proposition that Western subalterns, although they may misrecognize it, have more in common with colonial subalterns than they have differences is one made by Frantz Fanon in *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961). Fanon writes:

Ce travail colossal qui consiste à réintroduire l'homme dans le monde, l'homme total, se fera avec l'aide décisive des masses européennes qui, il faut qu'elles le reconnaissent, se sont souvent ralliées sur les problèmes coloniaux aux positions de nos maîtres communs. Pour cela, il faut d'abord que les masses européennes décident de se réveiller, secouent leurs cerveaux et cessent de jouer au jeu irresponsable de la Belle au bois dormant.¹⁹

Fanon's alignment of Western and colonial subaltern identities is central to my reading of a postcolonial Rimbaud. The representation of the constantly fluctuating identities of the Western subaltern and the colonial subaltern in *Une saison en enfer* anticipates Fanon's view that the two share more common ground than their ethnic and geographic differences suggest: *Une saison* exposes the coming to awareness that what passes itself off as innate and natural—home, nation, marriage, work, and, by extension, the entire set of Western canons and institutions—is constructed and discourse-bound. This realization inspires disgust, visceral and verbal, and triggers revolt in the subaltern ('Maintenant je suis maudit, j'ai horreur de la patrie' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 96)). Revolt is turned on language in a chain of monosyllabic phatic instances and corporeal eruptions ('Faim, soif, cris, danse, danse, danse!' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 98)). Violence, internalized and corporealized, is an-

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002), p. 103.

anticipated at the end of 'Mauvais sang': 'voici la punition, *En marche!* Ah! Les poumons brûlent, les tempes grondent! La nuit roule dans mes yeux, par ce soleil! le cœur... les membres...' (OC, p. 99). In 'Nuit de l'enfer' violence is expressed through the lexicon of plagues, hangmen, weapons, skinning, burning, poisoning, corporeal distortion, dysmorphia, suffocation, and aphasia ('les entrailles me brûlent. La violence du venin tord mes membres, me rend difforme, me terrasse. Je meurs de soif, j'étouffe, je ne puis crier' ('Nuit de l'enfer', OC, pp. 99–100)).

Violence is the corrosive currency binding colonized and colonizer. Here, Rimbaud's 'sauvage' internalizes colonial violence in ways that anticipate Sartre's contention that the aggression of the colonial project is transformed into terror and into a desire, initially suppressed, to wreak violence on its originators:

l'agression coloniale s'intériorise en Terreur chez les colonisés. Par là, je n'entends pas seulement la crainte qu'ils éprouvent devant nos inépuisables moyens de répression mais aussi celle que leur inspire leur propre fureur. Ils sont coincés entre nos larmes qui les visent et ces effrayantes pulsions, ces désirs de meurtre qui montent du fond des cœurs et qu'ils ne reconnaissent pas toujours: car ce n'est pas d'abord *leur* violence, c'est la nôtre, retournée, qui grandit et les déchire; et le premier mouvement de ces opprimés est d'enfouir profondément cette inavouable colère que leur morale et la nôtre réprouvent et qui n'est pourtant que le dernier réduit de leur humanité. Lisez Fanon: vous saurez que, dans le temps de leur impuissance, la folie meurtrière est l'inconscient collectif des colonisés.²⁰

Violence is the volatile basis of the relationship between colonizer and colonized: the volatility of reciprocal violence registers in the volatility of language that is at the core of avant-garde innovation. *Une saison* reveals this strikingly against a backdrop of colonial oppression and outsidership, through language that fissures and fragments, that tests logocentric logic to its limits, and that is powered by revolt. This is also a feature of Rimbaud's earliest poems, where relations founded on submission and inhibition spur, on metropolitan territory (the emblematic Ardennes), the potential for revolt that may be sexual, social, aesthetic, religious, or political, but which is always immediately and enduringly discursive.²¹ I turn back now to Rimbaud's represented worlds and to the counter-discourse of *Poésies*. Here, concern for the Western subaltern activates themes of exclusion and social injustice, and through irony and parody rallies opposition to the 'civilizing mission' synonymous with Second Empire cultural values, and prepares the thematic and discursive ground for *Une saison en enfer*.

Rimbaud's *Poésies* targets colonialism's 'civilizing mission' on *home* (met-

²⁰ Sartre discusses the participation of both colonizer and colonized in the same violence, in his Preface to the original 1961 edition of *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero), pp. 19–36 (p. 26).

²¹ Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, pp. 41–42.

ropolitan French) territory and sets about 'un-civilizing', or countering the tendency of civilization to pass itself off as the *natural* or innate state. Rimbaud sees Second Empire 'civilization' (understood in legal, aesthetic, religious, familial, political, and social forms) rather like William Morris, who, in *News from Nowhere* (1890), describes civilization as 'organized misery'.²² The represented worlds in Rimbaud's writing are, primarily, the socio-cultural spaces of the French capital and of Charleville, institutional spaces (those of the Church, monarchy, empire, army, the law, social class, and art), and the space of normative domesticity, spaces revisited in *Une saison en enfer* (and in *Illuminations*, for example, through the ironizing of the Western colonialist 'exporting' of 'l'éducation | Des races, des classes, et des bêtes' in 'Mouvement', ll. 12–13). These interconnected spaces in *Poésies* are exposed as a series of binary relationships between forms of authority and the oppressed (priest versus parish children; bourgeois versus social marginal; emperor or king versus subject; colonizer versus colonized). Alternatively, there may be a particular focus on, for example, the representative victim of military conflict ('Le Dormeur du val'); the economically excluded ('Les Effarés'); or the outsider narrator. The eruptive agency—corporeal or rhetorical—of an uncontainable subaltern challenges established forms of authority. Thus the soldier of 1870 'speaks' through the two gaping holes in his head in 'Le Dormeur du val', and the allusion to the Franco-Prussian War is a blast against the expansionist ideology of European nation states. The poet launches his charge against institutionalized taste; against legitimacy (monarchic, military, imperial, divine); against forces of reaction (and inaction) ('L'Orgie parisienne ou Paris se repeuple'); against bourgeois mercantilism and forms of hypocrisy ('A la musique'); and against logocentric power ('Voyelles').

The counter-discursive values of *Une saison en enfer* have their origin in three key areas of *Poésies*, all of which are related through the pressured narrative of the body: political authority, social relations, and aesthetic canons.

Political Authority and Subaltern Resistance

Rimbaud's *Poésies* relays a sustained appeal to revolutionary actions and ideals in transhistorical contexts. The 1789 Revolution, the Franco-Prussian War, and the defeat of the 1871 Commune are evoked or referenced, and

²² William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (1890; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), sets his nineteenth-century protagonist and time traveller, William Guest, in dialogue with an old antiquarian, Hammond. The latter's scathing assessment of British 'civilization' demonstrates the extension of oppression from the home context to overseas culture: 'I have read strange stories [in the British Library] of the dealings of "civilization" (or organized misery) with "non-civilization", from the time when the British Government deliberately sent blankets infected with small-pox as choice gifts to inconvenient tribes of Red-skins, to the time when Africa was infested by a man called Stanley' (p. 82).

their inscription in *Poésies* connects proleptically with the political action and ideological positioning affirmed by the narrator in *Une saison en enfer* ('je serai mêlé aux affaires politiques' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 96)). In *Poésies* an ethos of political action is taken forward with a keen sense of performative values wherever the discourse of the representative subaltern is embedded: 'Qui [. . .] brisiez le joug qui pèse | Sur l'âme et le front de toute l'humanité' (in 'Morts de quatre-vingt-douze', ll. 2–4). The poem entitled 'Le Forgeron', restaging the Revolutionary ideals of 1789, is a response to the autocracy of Napoleon III: here revolt, articulated by the subaltern voice of the eponymous blacksmith, mobilizes tropes of power and labour that transcend constructions of servitude: 'tous ceux dont le dos brûle | Sous le soleil féroce | [. . .] Nous sommes Ouvriers' (ll. 132–36). The blacksmith's rhetoric anticipates the discourse of the toiling slave or indentured labourer in *Une saison* obsessively turning around consciousness of *férocité*, a value harsh and empowering (the narrator of *Une saison* imagines himself a 'bête féroce' (OC, p. 93), and identifies with the 'féroces infirmes retour des pays chauds' (OC, p. 96), fantasizing about the retributive justice to be served on those who, in the prose poem 'Démocratie' (*Illuminations*), subject '[des] pays poivrés et détrempés' to 'la plus cynique prostitution' and 'de[] plus monstrueuses exploitations' (OC, p. 154)).²³ The gestural irony of placing the *bonnet rouge* on the head of Louis XVI, and a dialectical, identarian positioning of king and crowd, ruler and blacksmith-turned-people's spokesman, will be problematized in *Une saison* through modernist equivocation and a sense of porous individual subjectivity. In advance of *Une saison*, the eponymous blacksmith of 'Le Forgeron' offers abjectness as a defiant assertion of subaltern subjectivity ('C'est la crapule, | Sire. Ça bave aux murs, ça monte, ça pullule. [. . .] Je suis crapule. [. . .] Ils sont là maintenant, hurlant sous votre nez! Crapule. [. . .] C'est la crapule' (ll. 111–31)).²⁴ The sounds of *la crapule*—its resistant inarticulacy—assert a monological position which the dialogical voice of 'je' in *Une saison* will take up and problematize.

'L'Orgie parisienne', in *Poésies*, represents the return of the people to Paris following the fall of the Commune. The narrator identifies the post-Revolutionary 'rabble' with corruption and chaos, and an ironized vision of the (Christian) city ('Voilà la Cité sainte, assise à l'Occident' (l. 4)). Reaction, capitulation, and the seduction of the subaltern by the material offerings of urban commerce see 'civilizing' progress cede to the lure of the irrational and

²³ Jean-Louis Cornille, *Nègre de Dieu* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1989), pp. 27–30, discusses the blacksmith figure.

²⁴ By its paratext, 'Palais des Tuileries, vers le 10 août [17]92', the poem evokes the assault on the Tuileries. The blacksmith's rhetorical attack on the king echoes the iconic episode in the history of the French Revolution when the master butcher-turned-Revolutionary orator Louis Legendre imposed the Phrygian cap on Louis XVI in June 1792.

inchoate. The return of the *lâches* (Rimbaud's convulsive vision anticipates Djuna Barnes's urban hell in *Nightwood* (1936)) is an analepsis for *Une saison* and the narrator's revisioning and repudiation of 'Jadis' ('festin ancien'; 'carnet de damné'; 'colère', 'luxure', 'l'amour de tous les vices', 'ma race ne se souleva que pour piller' (OC, pp. 93–94)). The narrator of 'L'Orgie parisienne' identifies with the 'infâmes', the 'forçats', and the 'maudits' (ll. 69–70), anticipating the self-loathing narrator of *Une saison* and his wilful capitulation to abjection.

The Critique of Social Relations

Counter-discourse targets the 'civilizing mission on home territory' through bourgeois cultural institutions and social formations that will be more pervasively deconstructed in *Une saison* (through the topoi of marriage, love, and family). Here it is fruitful to reverse the postcolonial critique and see how certain of its key values 'speak back' to—and echo—the poetics of resistance explored in Rimbaud's early poetry, in which Western (capitalist) values, the *fons et origo* of concepts of race, first come under assault. In 'A la musique' civilization—in the form of the manicured Place de la Gare in Charleville—reveals an ethical wilderness and a space of fetishistic social desire and cupidity. The town square is the site of bourgeois rectitude: authority—that of nation state—is represented by the military band that entertains the Sunday gathering of townspeople. The bourgeois grocer is denounced by the narrator as a dealer in contraband tobacco while his status as *épicier* (literally, 'trader in spices') calls up the wider cultural and political memory of slavery and plantation life that supports the production of tobacco and spices. Bourgeois bodies are collectively overblown, sated, and dysmorphic, and cultural legitimacy is exploded by the force of satire. The townspeople parked on benches in Place de la Gare are the embodiment of local and central authority that, in Rimbaud, converges and *congeals* in the formation of Church, state, family, army, bourgeoisie, and is frequently metaphorized in static positions, e.g. the dead soldier who is the victim of militarism ('Le Dormeur du val'); the pew-bound parishioners whose Sundays are regulated by a sanctimonious priest ('Les Premières Communions'); the ageing clerks or unspecified readers, with their proto-surreal physiognomies and bodies, who are the sitting incarnation of ossified bureaucracy or paralytic readership ('Les Assis'):

Noirs de loupes, grêles, les yeux cerclés de bagues
Vertes, leurs doigts boulus crispés à leurs fémurs,
Le sinciput plaqué de hargnosités vagues
Comme les floraisons lépreuses des vieux murs;

Ils ont greffé dans des amours épileptiques
 Leur fantasque ossature aux grands squelettes noirs
 De leurs chaises; leurs pieds aux barreaux rachitiques
 S'entrelacent pour les matins et les soirs!
 Ces vieillards ont toujours fait tresse avec leurs sièges
 (ll. 1–9)

Their scaly, leprous quality and epileptic propensities stretch forward to *Une saison* with its visions of corporeal abjection, decline, and distortion, and *Une saison* looks back, through its melding of postcolonial critique and a more universal poetics of resistance, to the poet's critical 'troubling' of Western values of work, family, ownership, authority, and constraint on 'home territory' (Europe, France, the Ardennes, Charleville). Bourgeois cultural immobilism is opposed by physical and rhetorical action, and by symbolic gesture, and this is a clear connection with the poet's exploration of aesthetic values across *Poésies* and *Une saison en enfer*. Rimbaud's poetry, across the separation of verse and prose poetry, engages proleptically with Achille Mbembe's vision of 'le Nègre de blanc' and 'le Blanc de nègre', and the reversibility (and collapse) of identitarian values integral to the journey towards a sense of universal community.²⁵

The Assault on Aesthetic Canons

The mobilization against institutionalized Western values is explicit in *Une saison en enfer*, where, in the preface to his 'carnet de damné', the narrator in hell arms himself against canons (specifically those of justice and beauty). That mobilization is already under way in *Poésies*, where it is exposed spectacularly in Rimbaud's sonnet 'Vénus Anadyomène' through the assault on orthodox beauty and its representation. The vision of female hideousness rising from a 'cercueil vert en fer' is a counterblast to the tradition of exoticist and mythological representations of bathers, as instanced by Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque* (1814) and his *Bain turc* (1862), or by Chassériau's *Vénus marine* (1838) and his *Tepidarium* (1853). The conflation of mythological nudity and oriental nakedness, perfected by Romantic painters earlier in the century and, later, in the Second Empire and across the Third Republic, by academic painters such as Alexandre Cabanel and William Bouguereau, is thus contested—retrospectively and prospectively—by Rimbaud's scandalous revision of the Venus bathing/birthing scene.

In Rimbaud's 'Vénus Anadyomène' Beauty is born, not of civilization, but in the wilderness in a text that is performative. The default present tense relays the process of dismantling canonical beauty (the birth of Venus myth) and

²⁵ Achille Mbembe, *Critique de la raison nègre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013), pp. 73–79.

bourgeois art in the unfolding of the reading process. In a series of startling reversals, beauty morphs into ugliness, and the mythological or exoticist trope is shattered by Rimbaud's grotesque bather. This figure gives birth to a new art of beauty's dereliction as canonical beauty morphs into a form of disturbing and irreducible hybridity that resists appropriation: clinical specimen, dead flesh, anti-Venus. Rimbaud's anti-Venus spurs a new sensibility, performing an aesthetics of mess that will go on to inform certain currents of twentieth-century art. The sonnet limns a space of alterity based on mess and waste that projects forward, for example, to the conceptual artist Michelangelo Pistoletto's installation work *The Venus of the Rags* (1967) and an aesthetics of debris. Rimbaud's sonnet tackles values of taste and beauty, launching a violent repudiation of those values and substituting counter-values in advance of the onslaught of *Une saison*. With the decorative values of Romantic exoticism banished, the civilizing project, in its art and aesthetic dimensions, is depreciated and dismantled. With the Western canon of beauty savagely deposed, the centre becomes peripheral and excluded.

'Vénus Anadyomène' is thus at the origin of the project, articulated dramatically in *Une saison en enfer*, to consign beauty and taste, in their orthodox Western affirmative sense, to the dross-heap of cultural memory. The rejection of canonical values and the revolt against justice are staged in the social and political critique articulated in many of the texts of *Poésies*, before being reprised at the beginning of *Une saison*. Forms of mess (stain, spillage, overflow) and signs of maculation corporealized by the lumbering grotesque of 'Venus Anadyomène' are distributed more widely across Rimbaud's *Poésies*. Take the polluted seascape of 'Le Bateau ivre' ('taches de vins bleus et de vomissures', 'morves d'azur' (ll. 19, 74)). In its exploration of visionary and iconoclastic values 'Le Bateau ivre' enacts decentring on a European and transnational stage, driven by a centrifugal desire. Here, the centre no longer holds and dross and debris—material, corporeal, linguistic—are projected to the periphery. 'Le Bateau ivre' is the text that is most proleptic of *Une saison* in its discursive range and fury, and its decentring energy. It is also the text in which references to debris and disgust are most insistently cumulative in anticipation of the explosive force of *Une saison*.

The flight from France and from Europe (and European values) is already under way in 'Le Bateau ivre', which figures, in conclusion, the shrinking of 'Europe' to a puddle. The same flight from the West provides the centrifugal momentum of the imagined geographies of *Une saison* ('Je quitte l'Europe' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 95)). In the first instance the Orient is envisioned as an imperial and masculinist proving ground. Dilated by exoticizing desire, which is subsequently critiqued (in 'Délires II, Alchimie du verbe' (OC, p. 106)) the

dream of *ailleurs* dead-ends in the predictabilities of the colonial project and its institutionalization on home territory:²⁶

Je reviendrai, avec des membres de fer, la peau sombre, l'œil furieux: sur mon masque, on me jugera d'une race forte. J'aurai de l'or: je serai oisif et brutal. Les femmes soignent ces féroces infirmes retour des pays chauds. Je serai mêlé aux affaires politiques. Sauvé. ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 96)²⁷

Through the voice of the subaltern narrator in *Une saison en enfer* Rimbaud calls into question, explicitly and dramatically, those universalist values—Western and Euro-centric idea(l)s—that are exposed and destabilized already in *Poésies*. *Une saison* oscillates between constructions of East and West modulated by the displacements of the narrator voice between marginalized white European (French; Gaullish) and a range of other outsider and subaltern identities. So, it is to *Une saison* that I turn more fully.

'Une saison en enfer' and the Critique of Western Values

In representational terms, the position of the damned one of *Une saison en enfer* is a (post)colonial analogue of the *poète maudit* (itself, a self-evidently anti-canonical identity): 'je suis de la race qui chantait dans le supplice' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 97). Servitude and constraint spur an act of creative resistance and an affirmative political claim where poet and subaltern are united by their lyric purpose.

The Orient (variably constructed in *Une saison* as the East or Africa, and also as colonized Gaul) is an imagined space where Western dominant discourse is rehearsed and subverted. This space enables the strategic mimicry of the subaltern's position where visions fluctuate between colonial and postcolonial scenarios. As the narrator plays out conflicting and ultimately irresolvable situations, one identity segues into another, and the voice of the putative colonizer merges with that of the colonized himself: 'Allons! La marche, le fardeau, le désert, l'ennui et la colère' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 96). Subjectivities that are fluid and provisional—not hardened and fast like 'identity'—relay Rimbaud's modernist aesthetic in its pursuit of volatility and its

²⁶ Here the narrator reviews critically his previous fetishistic cultural predilections and reveals his exoticist taste: 'J'aimais les peintures idiotes, dessus de portes, décors, toiles de saltimbanque, enseignes, enluminures populaires; la littérature démodée, latin d'église, livres érotiques sans orthographe, romans de nos aïeules, contes de fées, petits livres d'enfance, opéras vieux, refrains niais, rythmes naïfs. Je rêvais croisades, voyages de découvertes dont on n'a pas de relations, [. . .], déplacements de races et de continents: je croyais à tous les enchantements' ('Délires II: Alchimie du verbe').

²⁷ This anticipates Rimbaud's real-life experience: his lucrative trading in East Africa, his political manœuvring in Abyssinia, his explosive frustrations, and his invalidated return to France and to the care of a woman (his sister Isabelle). See Robb, *Rimbaud*, Chapters 33–39.

undoing of determinations, and anticipate the concept of hybridity that Homi Bhaba describes.²⁸

The discourse of the first-person narrator articulates the condition of slavery in a context that re-presents tropes of colonial subjugation and revolt, linked to inheritance and vicarious projections ('Encore tout enfant, j'admirais le forçat intraitable sur qui se referme toujours le baigne [. . .] je voyais *avec son idée* le ciel bleu et le travail fleuri de la campagne; je flairais sa fatalité dans les villes' ('Mauvais sang', *OC*, p. 96)). Seeing with and through the eyes of the subaltern other—that irredeemable prisoner of 'Mauvais sang'—is consonant with becoming other and with the rejection of static identity positions. Modernist impersonality ('Je est un autre') is the route to a more porous exploration of subjectivity, that is an intersubjectivity.²⁹

Like Fanon's description of the subaltern as one resistant to 'civilizing' values (work, progress, material modernity) and impervious to morality, Rimbaud's portrait of his traveller through hell depicts lawlessness and licentiousness, indolence and brutality ('J'ai [. . .] tous les vices' (*OC*, p. 94)). To reprise Fanon's terms, the Rimbaudian subaltern is 'la quintessence du mal'.³⁰ The narrator is prone to ironizing identity constructions, thereby extending the process that we saw unfold in 'Le Forgeron' (*Poésies*), where the eponymous blacksmith relishes the 'crapule' identity and assumes a term of abuse ('C'est la Crapule, | Sire. Ça bave aux murs, ça monte, ça pullule'). Writing (or writing back) from a subaltern and outsider position activates tropes of revolt and action.

Resistance to normative civilization involves reclaiming the wilderness (materially or metaphorically): the space of the unpredictable, the excessive, and the marginal.³¹ The invoking of uncivilized indigenism in material, linguistic, political, and psychic terms identifies the individual as the wild other and outsider, the pariah who calls plagues on the land and covers himself in sand and blood. Wilful acts of self-sully mark the refusal to subordinate self to embrace the 'hygiene' of Western values by a narrator who might be seen in *Une saison* as a gender-reassigned homologue of the anti-Venus of *Poésies*. The subaltern's refusal to assimilate the values of 'home', 'nation', and 'class' echoes the early 'mess' poems of *Poésies*, such as 'Les Cher-

²⁸ Homi Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). Bhaba's hybridity, in its stress on displacement, shift, and diaspora, can help bring into dialogue the postcolonial and the values of modernism and the avant-garde.

²⁹ 'Je est un autre' comes from the first of the 'lettres du voyant', sent by Rimbaud to Georges Izambard on 13 May 1871, *OC*, pp. 248–49.

³⁰ Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, pp. 7, 45.

³¹ The wilderness trope is mobilized in Rimbaud's early poetry: the young poet narrator wears out his shoes on the rough track that leads to the inn in 'Au cabaret-vert: vers cinq heures du soir'; the corn of 'Sensation' pricks his skin and sensations are stirred, thus awakening consciousness and activating the rejection of static, ossified positions.

cheuses de poux' and 'Les Effarés'. To this correspond the subjective shifts whereby the speaker becomes, successively or simultaneously, a hyena, a leper among the shards and tesserae of civilization, a prisoner, and a degenerate scion and the product of 'Mauvais sang'; he is both a descendant of the Gauls and different; he belongs to 'la race inférieure' (and thus, exasperatedly, to the colonial European project) and is also the uncontainable.

Occupying the wilderness is a means of resisting and interrupting the homogenizing process of Westernization that is synonymous with social and technical modernization. Rimbaud's writing points up this key process through the ironized vocabulary of progress, technology, development, science, and values associated with an ideology of superior reason ('La science, la nouvelle noblesse! Le progrès. Le monde marche!' ('Mauvais sang', OC, p. 95)): the universal values targeted by the poet are decidedly Western values; at the same time, the mimicking of Western values by the subaltern is integral to the strategic rejection of colonialism's (en)forced binaries. This offers a prospective alignment with Frantz Fanon, who, in *L'An V de la révolution algérienne*, explores the colonized people's active *appropriation* (rather than assimilation) of values that undermine colonialism's binary-based value systems.³² The (false-)ecstatic deployment of the exclamation mark simultaneously invokes and parodies Enlightenment ideals and the values of modernization that inform the imperial project. These values are relativized and debunked in *Une saison*, where a sense of unaltering alienation is spurred by recognition of Western civilization as a series of 'développements cruels' ('L'Impossible', OC, p. 113) and the space of lapsed and constraining institutions. Christianity as a dominant discourse and the values of work (from 'Les Assis' to *Une saison*) are contested as forces that turn human subjects into slaves to *ennui*. Heterosexual marriage in a bourgeois climate is denounced no less vigorously: 'Il dit, "Je n'aime pas les femmes. L'amour est à réinventer, on le sait. Elles ne peuvent plus que vouloir une position assurée. La position gagnée, cœur et beauté sont mis de côté: il ne reste que froid dédain, l'aliment du mariage, aujourd'hui"' ('Délires I, Vierge folle', 'L'Époux infernal', OC, p. 103). Dysphoria propels the search for counter-values; it drives the desire to redefine concepts, to overhaul language, to reinvent love, and it looks back in disgust, recalling in *Poésies* the extravagant avarice of the *bien-pensantes bourgeoises* of Charleville and the pernicious charm of their daughters ('A la musique').

The narrator repudiates civilization and asserts the values of the wilderness. By extension, stones and debris are the foundation of his taste, in both the gustatory and the cultural senses ('Si j'ai du goût, ce n'est guère | Que pour la terre et les pierres. | Je déjeune toujours d'air, | De roc, de charbons, de fer'

³² Frantz Fanon, *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (Paris: Maspero, 1959).

(‘Faim’, OC, p. 109, ll. 1–4)). Harshness (‘la réalité rugueuse’ (‘Adieu’, OC, p. 116)) is the unpolished, ‘uncivilized’ culture that he embraces.

Identity is shored up and shattered; symmetries are posed and immediately problematized; binary positions are scrambled. Perpetually shifting the ground through self-cancelling assertions and affirmations is to deconstruct the language of Western hegemonies (the Christians whose arrival is anticipated at the end of ‘Mauvais sang’). If the narrator refuses to inhabit (in any definitive way) the pagan identity, he also relishes his subaltern position. His refusal to embrace Christian values spurs, ironically, a yearning after Christianity; as he derides God so the subaltern desires God: ‘Dieu fait ma force et je loue Dieu’ (‘Mauvais sang’, OC, p. 98). Yet, the same desire is contested or cancelled several sentences later by ‘je ne me crois pas embarqué pour une noce avec Jésus-Christ pour beau-père’ (‘Mauvais sang’, OC, p. 99). Thus, the theme of volatility is inscribed in discourse itself: a sign of postcolonial resistance to binary positioning is also, at the same time, a sign of modernist fluidity.

The mobilization of the ‘je’ against static representations and positions is a refusal of the teleology of colonialism, and of representationalism. The process of destabilizing notions of static selfhood challenges the authority vested in language, or to quote Terdiman in his deconstructive reading of the *poètes maudits* (Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Lautréamont), ‘they strove to de-saturate and disestablish [the] ideological predominance [of dominant discourse]’.³³ In postcolonial narrative, as in modernism, all values lend themselves to relativizing or to more thoroughgoing problematization. In *Une saison* stylistic features such as irony, instability of perspective, and a disjunctive and disruptive world-view animate a space where fixed positions and values are contested and displaced; a space where Manichaean oppositions collapse and are cancelled. All-pervading is a sense of reversal and of endless subsequent reversibilities as values become unfixed and certainties are swept away by a series of interrogatives: ‘A qui me louer? Quelle bête faut-il adorer? Quelle sainte image attaque-t-on?’ (‘Mauvais sang’, OC, p. 96). The constant travelling between potential positions, with obdurate resistance to fixing, exposes the absolutes of Western culture as relative, substitutable, and floating, and sometimes even as empty signifiers. The narrator’s pursuit of porous forms of subjectivity that repudiate ideologies and reject originary ‘truth’ anticipates the key values of fluidity and diversity of subjectivity that look ahead to twentieth- and twenty-first-century postcolonial thought, particularly Édouard Glissant’s poetics of ‘relation’ in its embrace of aesthetic and political values.³⁴

³³ Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, p. 51.

³⁴ Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990). Glissant’s thought in relation to forms of cultural resistance is explored and illuminated by Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999).

Conclusion

This has been an attempt to think Rimbaud's poetry—specifically *Poésies* and *Une saison en enfer*—through a postcolonial prism that is pertinent and resonant in *textual* terms. We have seen that there is more connectedness between the worlds of *Poésies* and *Une saison* than the field of Rimbaud Studies has traditionally conceived, and that this connectedness is founded on the relation of postcolonial values and modernist values.

This article has performed its own hybrid poetics in showing how the two books relate. *Poésies* works in unexpected ways to launch the process of deconstructing colonial identities explored in *Une saison* and reciprocally, the tropes of hegemonic authority and subaltern revolt explored in *Une saison* can assist in fresh readings of *Poésies*. *Poésies* has a proleptic and analeptic status in relation to Rimbaud's poetic narrative *en enfer*. The imagined worlds of *Poésies* and the vision of *Une saison* are interrelated through those processes of morphing and mutation of voices and values that allow the reader to travel backwards and forwards across the discursive landscape of the two books. The two books are more hybrid than they are disjunctive, and that hybridity enables us to escape binary ways of thinking and invites us to explore Rimbaud's work in a more holistic way, testing postcolonial thought on *other* ground.

Reading Rimbaud in this way helps us to think differently about the boundaries of our discipline as we test the scope and the salience of concepts in postcolonialism beyond their standard fields of application.³⁵ To explore the question of how postcolonial thought works, or might work, with and through metropolitan modernist poetry (and vice versa) is to challenge the normative limitations of period, aesthetic, and literary culture, and also to reframe critical perspectives that have persisted too long in separating modernist practice and postcolonial thought.³⁶

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³⁵ See Sylvia Huot, *Postcolonial Fictions in the 'Roman de Perceforest': Cultural Identities and Hybridities* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), for readings of French medieval romance through tropes of postcolonialism. In English Studies, important works have emerged in recent years examining postcolonial/modernist imbrications of the mid-twentieth century: J. Dillon Brown, *Migrant Modernism: Postwar London and the West Indian Novel* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013); Peter J. Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters: British Literary Culture and the Emergence of Postcolonial Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), exposes the affinity of canonical modernist authors and late colonial writers through shared concepts of aesthetic autonomy and experimentalism.

³⁶ The oneiric anti-logic of *Illuminations*, Rimbaud's prose poems, develops that quality and offers a further test bed for a postcolonial reading. The challenge to Western humanist assumptions performed in *Une saison* extends through *Illuminations*, where the resisting of doxa involves an ever more determined rejection of Western 'logic' and reason. It is to that further critical horizon that the present reading ultimately points. See Maurice Blanchot on the relations of *Une saison* and *Illuminations*: 'L'Œuvre finale', in *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 421–31.